

Memorandum

To: Dave Teter
Deputy Director, Fire Protection

Date: October 26, 2015

Telephone: (916) 651-9180

Website: www.fire.ca.gov

From: Justin Sanders
Deputy Chief, Conservation Camps Program
Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

Subject: Emergency Fire Pay - Inmate Fire Fighters

Tracking Number:

ISSUE:

The reduction of incentives for inmates to volunteer for the conservation camp program and the resulting ongoing statewide shortage of inmate firefighters assigned to fire crews.

BACKGROUND:

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) in cooperation with California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) operates 39 conservation camps that house 196 fire crews. The CAL FIRE crews respond to wildfires, floods, weather events, search and rescue operations, earthquakes and other emergency incidents. When not responding to emergency incidents, the fire crews are engaged in conservation and community service work projects for state, federal, and local government agencies.

The Conservation Camps Program is a voluntary program. The CDCR offenders that are assigned to minimum security facilities (MSF) and are eligible by passing the medical examination and the offender criteria process, still must volunteer for the camps program. The Conservation Camps Program is currently experiencing extremely low numbers volunteers. Out of the 39 Conservation Camps that can house 4100 offenders, the maximum amount of fire crew members is 3332 (196 fire crews X 17 offenders per crew). The current fire crew strength assigned to the 196 fire crews is 2559 thus the statewide shortage of fire crew members assigned to fire crews is **773**.

The offenders that are not volunteering for the camps program are instead choosing other CDCR alternative custody programs (ACP). All offenders that are assigned to MSF's are now receiving two for one sentencing credits that used to be an exclusive credit to only the camps program. Now with all of the MSF population receiving these sentencing credits, the availability of offenders volunteering for the camps program is extremely low; there is no incentive.

One MSF incentive that still remains exclusive only to the camps program is emergency fire pay. The current emergency fire pay rate is \$1.00 per hour while assigned to a wildland fire. The \$1.00 per hour has been the same rate of pay for over 40 years. If CAL FIRE were able to raise the emergency fire pay then more offenders would likely volunteer for the camps program.

DISCUSSION:

An average of \$3.4 million dollars is paid per year to inmate firefighters @ \$1.00 per hour.

- 2012 – 3.8 million – 2700 Inmate Firefighters average (196 fire crews @ 14 inmates per crew) @ 1400 Fire Hours each.
- 2013 – 2.7 million – 2700 Inmate Firefighters average (196 fire crews @ 14 inmates per crew) @ 1000 Fire Hours each.
- 2014 – 3.6 million – 2700 Inmate Firefighters average (196 fire crews @ 14 inmates per crew) @ 1300 Fire Hours each.

If the emergency fire pay rate for offenders were raised to \$2.00 per hour the average annual amount would rise to \$6.8 million.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Increase the emergency pay rate to \$2.00 per hour for only fire crew members. (In-camp staff supporting incidents would remain at the current \$1.00 per hour rate.)
 - Positive factors
 - Additional offenders would volunteer for the camps program
 - The camps receiving center population would increase
 - All available fire crew positions on a fire crew would be filled
 - The Department would retain tactical strength for fire suppression and minimize the potential for future camp closures.
 - Reduced potential for downsizing camp program and displacing employees
 - Negative factor
 - Additional E Fund costs
2. Retain current \$1.00 per hour emergency pay rate for all inmate fire personnel
 - Positive factor
 - No addition costs
 - Negative factors
 - Offenders continue to not volunteer for the camps program
 - The camps receiving center population would remain low
 - Down staffing of fire crews due to lack of volunteers
 - Increased potential for camp closures and employee displacement

IMPACTS

Some potential consequences related to the reduction of offenders volunteering for the camps program:

- ✓ Fiscal – Additional cost to replace fire crews down staffed due to the lack of offenders volunteering for the camps program. Per the 2009 SIR, it would cost no less than \$26.4 million per year to staff one five crew camp with Firefighter I's.
- ✓ Operational – Less fire crews available due to lack of offenders volunteering for the camps program. This would result in the reliance on federal, county and private fire crews during periods of high fire activity. These costs, per 24 hour shift range from four to eight times higher than the cost of a comparable inmate crew.
- ✓ Legal – N/A
- ✓ Labor – CDF Firefighters has consistently voiced its desire to staff fire camps with CAL FIRE personnel (Firefighter I's)
- ✓ Sociopolitical - Less fire crews are engaged in conservation and community service work projects for state, federal, and local government agencies.
- ✓ Policy – N/A
- ✓ Health and safety – Less fire crews respond to wildfires, floods, weather events, search and rescue operations, earthquakes and other emergencies incidents.
- ✓ Environmental – Less fuel reduction projects are completed potentially resulting in the increase in large damaging fires in the future
- ✓ Interagency – Reduction of fire crews utilizing CDCR offenders will likely result in CDCR downstaffing Camps and displacing employees

RECOMMENDATION:

Alternative 1. Increase the emergency pay rate to \$2.00 per hour for only fire crew members.

APPROVED:

Date

CONCUR:

Date